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I Run Because I Can; I Run for Those Who Can't

In May of 2009, I learned that my son was about to deploy as an Army Reservist. I knew that I had to do something to manage my stress better. My daughter-in-law invited me to join a weight loss center with her. Standing only 5 foot 3 inches tall, I tipped their scale on the initial visit at 201 pounds.

After a week on their nutrition plan, I began adding activity. The base of my fitness program was walking. I walked 30 minutes a day for 30 consecutive days, breaking it up into 10 minute segments when needed. I had read a book by a cardiac surgeon who said that's what he wanted his patients to do before surgery. I figured if it was good enough for them, it was good enough for me. It was a good thing I did, because later that year, I needed surgery to correct a misbehaving parathyroid that was resulting in bone loss. I had surgery days before my son left for pre-mobilization training. I said good bye to him at the airport with bandages on my neck. Several months would pass before I would see him again.

At the end of this training, his unit transitioned to Fort Hood, Texas, arriving the night of November 4, 2009. The next day he gave up his seat in the Soldier Readiness Center to another soldier and went to lunch. While he was on his way back to the building, things began to go horribly wrong inside that room. The soldier to whom he had given up his seat was one of 32 wounded; 13 lost their lives that day. My son had many emotions to deal with in the aftermath of those events. So did his mother.

In the course of processing those feelings, it was clear that one cannot go back and undo horrible things that happen. But I could live my life from there on in such a way as to honor those who lost theirs that day, or had theirs forever altered. Midway through the next year, someone decided that a Run to Remember would be a good way to honor the fallen. The distance was based on the lives lost, 13.1 miles, which is a half marathon. At that point I had lost the weight, but I did not believe I could up my game to a half marathon in the months before the run. Instead, I committed to a 5K (3.1 miles) on the anniversary of the tragedy.

I trained for that 5K with a Couch to 5K training plan I found online. I was unable to go run it in Fort Hood, but by the time the anniversary rolled around, my son was home from Iraq. He agreed to "run to remember" with me, right here on the MoPac trail outside Lincoln. We ran our 5K together and released gold star-shaped balloons with the names of the fallen on them.

This, however, was not enough for me. I have gone on to finish a half marathon 7 times. At each starting line, I invoke the name or names of someone who cannot do it. My motto is: "I run BECAUSE I can; I run FOR those who cannot."

Life is good. It is better when I'm fit. It is at its best when my journey touches those of kindred spirits and we can encourage one another. The culture of a healthier lifestyle that has been encouraged here at the State of Nebraska is one way we have of finding those kindred spirits, and helping one another along the path to living life to the fullest: creatively, consciously, and consistently making better choices to support our health and well-being.